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Atari Online News, Etc.
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~ Spam Ain't Dead Yet! ~ People Are Talking! ~ eBay Wins Ruling!
~ Mac Virus Bounty Is Off ~ Microsoft ID System! ~ No More PS2 Sales?

~ Phishing Still Climbing ~ Windows XP 'N' Edition ~ CGE 2K5 Update!
~ Microsoft Sues Phishers ~ Blaster Payback Lowered ~ Comdex Cancelled!

-* Mac Hacker Attacks On Rise! *-
-* P2P Heads To Supreme Court Showdown *-
-* IRS Considers eBay Sales As Taxable Income *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Yeah, I know, a week or so ago I was sitting around with a major chip on my shoulder. Okay, so it may have been a two-by-four. The snow was on the horizon, for the 24th time this season. We managed to climb to the fourth highest total snowfall on record. And Spring was nowhere in sight except on a calendar. Well, except for the torrential downpours earlier in the week, and more this weekend, the weather has improved my disposition considerably. Improved. There's still a lot of "stuff" going on that has me in a rut, but the onset of Spring does work its positive power. Heck, most of the snow is gone and I can see grass throughout the yard. Now for some prolonged sun and higher temperatures, and we'll be all set. Now if I can just figure out how to manage the job stress, I'll be in good (better?) shape.

You know, it just dawned on me the other day this year marks the 20th anniversary of Atari computers. I believe that it was 1985 when the 520ST first arrived. It was 1987 when I first got mine. I felt like a kid in a toy store for the first time! It was terrific. I still have that machine, but it's not set up any longer because of the Falcon that finally "replaced" it. But, I still remember getting various new software - a variety of stuff like productivity, games, and many other types. I couldn't get enough. Then it was the second floppy drive, a modem, a hard drive (wow, all 20 megs!), a color monitor, and the like. And then the online experience! An entirely new world opened up! How about those users groups - another terrific Atari experience! It's hard to believe that it all started 20 years ago. The experience continues, but it's certainly drastically diminished over the years. Today, it's a shell of its former glory, but it still remains something to enjoy. And no, this is no April Fools joke.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone, and I'm

having trouble hitting the right keys on the keyboard... someone must have changed the keys around when I wasn't looking!

It's been a tough couple of weeks. Dealing with ISO re-certification at the same time I was straightening out some DEP problems has proven quite a challenge, but the worst of it seems to be over now... I hope.

So let's just take it easy this week and get right to the news and stuff from the UseNet, okay? Thanks. I appreciate it.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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'Phantom' asks about a modification he found in his Falcons:

"I have 2 Falcons here both with a similar modification.

I believe it has something to do with a Clock modification but not sure.

The modification is a chip piggy-backed on top of the socketed U63 with several wires running to the removed resistors R221, R222, and a few more in the general area.

I remember in a lot of upgrades like the Nemesis, these same resistors have to be removed and wires connected to them.

Does anyone know what this modification is called and what exactly it's suppose to do?

And what performance gains if any are expected?

This modification appears to be the only one on the boards."

'Rustynutt' tells Phantom:

"It's the Falcon Clock Patch. The F04 ties three clocks together, inverts the signal (basically for a delay), and routes them back to the board through the three resistor pads you see (resistors removed). Early Falcons did not have them installed. There were a couple of revisions as well until one was settled on by Atari as working the best.

Some stock unmodified Falcons can get by without one, unless your using SDMA intensive stuff like Cubase Audio. Even stock, you might run into problems with SCSI hard disk if the Clock Patch isn't installed."

Phantom replies:

"I'm a bit confused on something. Were there any Atari Falcons made by Atari that didn't need this Clock modification because a Factory modification or revision was made?

Would you happen to know if this modification goes bad if it would

cause the Falcon video to go Black and or would it cause the
Falcon to appear dead?

My first Falcon was a stock TOS 4.04 4meg unit with no modifications.
I did a lot of D2D recording with no problems at all.
Now I have a Centurbo II version B installed by myself in the same
Falcon and it works great.

Although I did run into a strange problem with HD Driver.
I could not get my SCSI hard drives, CD-Rom, and CDR drives to
be seen in the Turbo modes.

The Fix was to select Cecile in the CT2B menu and all SCSI devices
worked great from then on.

I'm not knocking HD Driver, it's a great program. But the version I was
using sure did not work with my CT2B setup. Maybe a newer version
would work. It looked like a timing problem to me. Every time I'd
try to bootup with the SCSI Drives attached HD Driver would not
see them, However the Leds on each drive would blink but not
like they normally did during a working bootup.

I recall discussing the Falcons SCSI timing with Alex at ATY Computers.
It seems that there's a fine line in the SCSI system and if the signals
don't arrive at the proper time upon booting, then the SCSI Devices
will not connect up to be used by the Falcon.

If I'm not mistaken, the CT2B speeds up the SCSI system in Turbo
Modes. I'd have to check the Docs to be positive on that. So it
may have been that the signals to the SCSI Devices were faster
than normal causing the problem.

Back to Stock Falcons.....

I remember reading about some new factory Falcons having clicks and
problems when doing any D2D recording. I am assuming this is part of the
reason for this Clock modification?

I also recall discussions about the metal shielding on the factory IDE
hard drives. I'm not sure what the problem was, but I remember
discussions on moving the shielding to the other side of the IDE drive
may fix the problem.

I think it may have been some type of IDE hard drive problem and it was
thought that interference from the Power supply maybe causing the problem.

I never installed that shielding when replacing the factory IDE with
drives that had more space on them. And never had a problem to my
knowledge.

Do you remember what that IDE problem was all about and what the IDE
hard drive shielding was really for?"

Rustynutt tells Phantom:

"They designed the problem into the machine. <grin>

A bad buffer mod can cause those problems. A good way to test is
to remove the buffer mod, replace the three resistors removed and test

the machine. Also, the "U" GALS are known to burn out, and will cause a dead machine. The non-working board you bought from me years ago had the GALS swapped out, so that wasn't the problem there. Wizztronics use to carry spares GALS.

I use HD Driver with both the Mighty Sonic and Afterburner, each with Nemesis as the bus speeder. At speeds up to 48/24MHz I didn't have problems. I also use a NOVA ATI card, which unloads the bus because the Videl isn't being used. Without the NOVA, and expanded resolutions setup for the Videl, SCSI problems appeared at accelerated speeds. 40/20 was always stable. I sold my CT2b after the first attempt to install it and reinstalled the Mighty Sonic on that one machine. I recall Cecile resolving some issues with drives, but never got that far into the trouble shooting.

I never had IDE problems, even with extended cables and full form drives. The IDE shielding might have been included on the Falcon to meet FCC requirements, which was one of the reasons it's release was delayed so long back in the day."

Ronald Hall asks about BBS software:

"I'm trying to find BBS Express ST! software. I had this at one time, in fact I used it to run "The DarkForce! BBS" years ago. Actually, I've still got the software backed up on hard drive and Syquest carts. What I don't have now is the manuals or disks. Sadly, somewhere, somehow, they've been misplaced or thrown away.

I just recently bought BBS Express ST! software from Bravo Sierra. Unfortunately, its an older version, while it was still maintained by Keith Ledbetter (there's a name from the past, anyone know where or what he is doing now?).

So anyway, if anyone knows where I can buy original disks and manuals I sure would appreciate it."

Lonny Pursell tells Ronald:

"You might try asking this guy. He bought the rights to the 8-bit BBS Keith used to own. Maybe he knows what Keith is up to. http://www.angelfire.com/mn/video61/ "

David Leaver asks about partition size for Fat32 disks under MagiC:

"What is the maximum size of a Fat32 partition with Magic 6.20?"

Adam Klobukowski tells David:

"The maximum size of Fat32 partition is 2TB (TerraBytes). I do not think Magic has lower limits."

Sam F. asks for help with installing Publisher ST2:

"I need help installing this app, cause it's really giving me fits.

I got the app from http://www.zhell.co.uk/magdisks.html,Atari ST User Coverdisks.

Anyone got a digital copy of the install docs they could email to me?"

'Tim' asks Sam:

"[Are] You talking about Timeworks Word Writer 2 (Word Processor)? I installed it and it seemed to unpack fine. I had to set a printer though but I cancelled that part."

Sam replies:

"No, I'm talking about Timeworks Publisher ST 2."

Tim checks and agrees with Sam:

"Nevermind I found it, yeah I also cannot get it installed."

'Tim' asks about TOS on disk and TOS 1.0:

"I have an old 520ST with boot Roms and I was playing around with it. (For Nostalgia only since it's kinda useless, Nice Boot Menu though!) I have a TOS 1.0 boot disk that I use with it (and my other ST's too to load old games!) Works fine. I also found a TOS Boot disk that seems to be a beta or something. It has a green/white checkered background (like in TOS 2.x) and also needs to be reloaded after a reset. Is this the actually TOS Boot Disk the early 520's came with? Or a beta disk? The Atari Logo also looks weird in the about menu. Anyone have a image of the original TOS disk they could send?"

'Ziggy' tells Tim:

"I don't remember where, but there was a site with pretty much every version of TOS known to man.. I think i found it via an emulation link..

As a side note, I wouldn't say a 520ST is "kind of useless" if it still works.."

Tim replies:

"There was one site I found:

http://homepage.mac.com/carlhafner/AtariTOS.html

And if you try the disk_tos100.st this is the one I am talking about!

Is this the beta TOS disk that was supplied with early 520ST computers?

What I meant as useless I mean once you load the TOS the computer has less than 200kb of memory, so it is useless!"

Well folks, that's it for this week. I know it's short, but between my hectic week and everyone else's, that about all there is. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Sony Ordered To Halt PS2 Sales!
Fresh Shooters Released!
Atari 'Retro Redux'!
And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Sony Ordered to Halt PlayStation Sales

Sony Corp. on Monday said it was ordered by a U.S. federal court to halt U.S. sales of its PlayStation game consoles and pay nearly $91 million in patent infringement damages to a California company, although the judge immediately put her ruling on hold.

The stay in the case means Sony will not actually have to stop importing or selling the PlayStation 2 console in the United States, and will not have to remove PS2s from store shelves, while the appeal is pending.

Financial analysts said there was little practical impact to the order.

"There's no way that Sony's going to stop selling PS2s any time soon, so I don't see the injunction ever taking effect," said Michael Pachter, an analyst at Wedbush Morgan.

"Clearly if Sony loses the appeal they will pay the judgment and enter into a royalty agreement," he added.

At issue is patents held by Immersion Corp. on vibration technology. The PS2's Dualshock controllers vibrate when players take actions in some games, like firing guns.

Immersion shares were up nearly 15 percent on the news, though Sony shares were basically unchanged.

Sony Computer Entertainment, Sony's gaming unit, said it would appeal the order, handed down last Thursday by a federal court in northern California.

A Sony spokeswoman in the United States said the appeal was in progress but declined to say when it would be filed. However, a Sony spokeswoman in Tokyo said the company would be paying compulsory license fees to Immersion while the appeal progressed through the courts.

Games accounted for 44 percent of Sony’s group operating profit from October to December, as its electronics division continues to struggle.

The $90.7 million awarded by the court is more than triple Immersion’s total revenues of $23.8 million in 2004.

The court’s decision confirmed a ruling last year that ordered Sony to pay $82 million in the case. The amount was raised to slightly more than $90 million due to interest.

Fresh First-Person Shooters Released

Most longtime gamers trace the first-person shooter era back to 1992’s "Wolfenstein 3D," id Software’s frenetic blend of combat and horror. But let’s not forget "Duck Hunt," the 1986 Nintendo classic that had many of us trying to shoot birds out the sky while avoiding the hunting dog who snickered at our futility.

Some of us can even date our FPS experience back to ancient, pre-video arcades. In an old-school shooting gallery, you could grab a rifle - a fairly realistic one, except it shot light beams - and start blowing away fake beer bottles. Today, with games like paintball and laser tag, you can enjoy the thrill of firing a weapon at your friends without anyone getting hurt.

Yes, we like to play with guns. It’s still legal, as long as you aren’t firing real guns at real people. I find it therapeutic to defuse my frustrations by blasting away at hordes of aliens, or robots or Nazi zombies.

So here are three new first-person shooters where the bullets fly fast and furious. Fire when ready.

o "Timesplitters: Future Perfect" (Electronic Arts, for the PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube): The latest in the "Timesplitters" series is that rare FPS with a sense of humor. You are Cortez, a marble-mouthed parody of Vin Diesel, and your job is to prevent the alien Timesplitters from tearing the space-time continuum asunder. The time-tripping gimmick guarantees a new environment for each mission: You’ll storm a Scottish castle in 1924, take on the Russians in 1969 and blast aliens in 2401. If you’re not careful you may slip into a wormhole and run into past and future versions of yourself. "Future Perfect" has lots of fun with shooter and sci-fi cliches, introducing characters in each era who are delightfully unfazed by the sudden arrival of a warrior from the future. (Harry Tipper, a groovy ’60s spy, is particularly charming.) You’ll have lots of fun trying out all the weaponry - from an old-fashioned Luger to a modern machine gun to a futuristic plasma rifle - and trying to keep up with the brain-bending, enjoyably silly story.

o "Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30" (Ubisoft, for the PS2, Xbox, PC): "Brothers in Arms," on the other hand, is ultra-serious, a return to the

grim World War II milieu immortalized by Steven Spielberg, Tom Brokaw and about a hundred other games. Despite the "been there, done that" feeling, "Brothers" offers a fresh take on the D-Day invasion. You are Sgt. Matt Baker, dropped with your fellow paratroopers behind enemy lines to disrupt the German defenses before the Allied troops land on Normandy. The gameplay is an absorbing mix of first-person shooting and squad-based strategy: You need solid aim and a quick trigger, but you also have to maneuver the other guys on your team to get the upper hand on the Nazis. The settings, weaponry and strategy all feel painstakingly authentic. And Sgt. Baker isn't your typical videogame super-soldier, so be prepared to die. A lot.

o "Project: Snowblind" (Eidos Interactive, for the PS2, Xbox, PC): Lt. Nathan Frost, the hero of this game, is one of those super-soldiers. He's been physically enhanced with technology that lets him slow down time, see in the dark or become invisible, and he has nifty weapons - like robot attack spiders to go with the standard rifle weapons - like robot atta-issue guns and grenades. But the cybernetic enhancements don't help much during the chaotic firefights, and the story line doesn't rise above the clich s of the genre, with your hard-boiled hero trying to prevent a renegade militia from launching a doomsday device. Still, "Snowblind" looks great, taking advantage of its near-future Hong Kong setting with dazzling set pieces in a Buddhist temple, an opera house and a corporate high-rise. When you're trying to escape down a corridor as windows explode all around, you may find yourself so pumped up that you'll forgive "Snowblind" for its by-the-numbers plot.

Flashback to the '80s: Parsons School of Design Partners with Atari for 'Retro Redux' 24-hour Video Game Jam

On April 2-3, Parsons School of Design, a division of New School University, will present its first 24-hour game design event, "Retro Redux", in collaboration with Atari, Inc. Teams of students from New York-area colleges and universities will compete to see if they have what it takes to design a game that withstands the test of time based on the original Atari 2600 technology, which gave rise to such classic games as Asteroids, Missile Command, Pong and Centipede. The resulting games will be judged in the categories of top overall game, most innovative game design, best sound, and best visuals, with the top overall game to be featured in the an upcoming version of the Atari Flashback Game Console. Awards will be presented at a ceremony to be held on Monday, April 4 at 5 p.m. at the Theresa Lang Student Center, 55 West 13th Street, New York.

"Retro Redux provides students with the opportunity to test their creativity and design skills by re-inventing classic games from the birth of the video game era," said Katie Salen, the director of the MFA Design and Technology Program at Parsons and a professional game designer. "By bringing together students from the leading university game design programs in the New York area, Parsons will showcase the tremendous talent to be found in the region."

New York is home to a vibrant game design community, from industry-leading game companies such as Atari to numerous institutions offering programs in game development education including New York University, Renssaeler Polytechnic Institute, Mercy College, and the School of Visual Arts. Approximately 10 teams of five students each from these schools will participate in the Retro Redux Game Jam.

Atari, the company that started the gaming revolution when it introduced Pong to the world, has proven that great games never go out of style with last year's successful launch of the Atari Flashback Game Console. A plug-and-play system, the Atari Flashback offers gamers the chance to go back in time and see where it all started.

"Our partnership with Parsons for its first 24-hour game jam underscores Atari's commitment in inspiring and supporting future game designers," said Erik Gerson, senior vice president of Marketing for Atari. "Game design is the fastest-growing sector in the new media industry, and through educational programs such as those offered by Parsons, students receive the training and support they need to succeed in this exciting field."

"At Parsons, students learn to think critically about the role technology plays in the design, production, dissemination, and use of games," said Colleen Macklin, Chair of the Design and Technology Program at Parsons. "The tremendous success of our MFA-level concentration in game design made it clear to us that there was a demand for academic training at the undergraduate level as well. To meet this demand, we are launching a game design concentration at the BFA level this coming fall."

Classic Gaming Expo 2005

March 30, 2005

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CGE SERVICES CORPORATION ANNOUNCES SHOW DATES AND NEW LOCATION FOR CLASSIC GAMING EXPO 2005

Eighth Annual Classic Gaming Expo Moves to San Francisco VALLEY STREAM, NEW YORK, March 30, 2005

The 2005 Classic Gaming Expo will be held Aug. 20 and 21 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel at the San Francisco Airport in Burlingame, Calif., its organizers announced today. Now in its eighth year, Classic Gaming Expo is the world's largest event dedicated to the preservation and celebration of video game history. Classic Gaming Expo organizers chose the location because of its vast show space and the proximity to San Francisco tourism opportunities for visitors.

"Last year, we were excited to move to the area where the video game industry was born," said Joe Santulli, co-organizer of Classic Gaming Expo. "This year, we're tweaking the location to bring back the signature intimate atmosphere of the show, which was lost in the cavernous San Jose Convention Center. Classic Gaming Expo is meant to be a gathering of people who love video games. We want to ensure that everyone feels at home

at the show, and the Hyatt's warm environment is perfect for this." The Hyatt Regency at the San Francisco Airport is the largest convention hotel in northern California, one of the few places able to accommodate the estimated 1,700 people who attended last year's expo. The Hyatt is located two miles from the San Francisco Airport and the Bay Area Rapid Transit system, and offers complimentary shuttles to both. The 20-minute trip to downtown San Francisco should also appeal to attendees making Classic Gaming Expo part of their family vacations.

In 2004, people from all over the world attended Classic Gaming Expo to see the latest offerings from exhibitors, visit the world's largest and most comprehensive video game museum, play classic and modern games and meet the luminaries of video gaming's past and present. Notable personalities such as Steve Wozniak, Nolan Bushnell, Ralph Baer, Al Alcorn, Jay Smith, David Crane and other celebrities have attended past shows and spoken to Classic Gaming Expo attendees. Classic Gaming Expo is open to anyone with an interest in video games, both classic and modern. Gamers of all ages are welcome. Information about ticketing, attendance and past events is available at http://www.cgexpo.com.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

IRS May Consider EBay Sales Taxable Income

Hawking baby and children's clothes - along with some garage sale and thrift store bargains - on eBay helps Sunni Wojnarowsky bring in some extra money so she can afford to stay home with her two young boys. The additional dollars are great, but does she really need to hassle with the paperwork and report her small profit to the Internal Revenue Service? Her question, posed to the online auction site's discussion board for sellers, generated much advice - and more confusion.

In tax law, there is no clear, bright line that separates fun from profit, or a hobby from a business. But IRS instructions make it clear that all income - a category that includes bribes, gambling winnings, kickbacks and money made in illegal activities - can be taxed.

"You can't get an answer from anybody," Wojnarowsky said in an interview from her home in Brunswick, Ohio. "It would be nice to have a straightforward answer of yes, you file taxes, or no, you don't."

More than 135 million people have registered to use the auction site that calls itself "the world's online marketplace." Buyers bought more than $34 billion worth of merchandise there last year.

Some people make money by cleaning out items from their closets; others use the site to run small businesses.

"When you're working on the Internet, it's kind of a gray issue," said Bart Fooden, a certified public accountant in Woodbury, N.Y., who advises small

businesses and individuals. "The big issue is whether you're doing it as a business or not."

The IRS can apply a list of nine indicators that might prove whether someone's online auctions amount to a business. These indicators include evidence that the taxpayer depends on the income, acts in a businesslike manner, or puts enough time and effort into the activity to suggest a profit motive.

Fooden said the difference between a hobby and a business can often be the seller's intent.

If someone is selling the junk that is collecting dust in a garage or basement, then that person probably is getting less than he paid for it - no profit here. But if someone is buying goods in bulk from a wholesaler and hoping to make a couple extra bucks reselling each one, then that person could have just started a profitable business, Fooden said.

On the other hand, some categories are not so clear.

If a great-aunt's collection of antique china fetched top dollar from collectors, that might mean capital gains taxes are owed. And if someone scours neighborhood garage sales for great deals on comic books to resell on eBay, that might amount to running a business.

It often is best to ask a tax professional, said Bob Miller, who says he spends about 18 hours a day on eBay, selling collectable postage stamps and advising other buyers and sellers from his home in northern Utah.

"When the person that you owe the money to can throw you in jail, it's always a good idea to get professional advice," he said.

eBay spokesman Chris Donlay said the company does not report individual sales to the tax authorities. eBay urges users, in the site's educational materials and seminars, to learn about tax issues.

"It's really up to the seller, just like offline," he said. "We are just a venue, really. We're sort of like the mall landlord or the owner of the parking lot where the flea market happens."

It takes so little effort to set up shop on eBay that some might overlook the tax issues, Miller said.

"If you have an e-mail address, you can start selling. If you're a U.S.-based seller, you need to have a credit card and a bank account," Miller said.

"People have a feeling that they're selling on eBay, they're not a business. It's not true. If you are selling and making a profit, you have to declare it."

An eBay survey last year found that 430,000 of its U.S. sellers make a significant portion or all of their revenue from selling on eBay.

While it might sound like nothing good can come of the headache involved in claiming a small profit from online auctions, consider the perks. Business expenses can be deducted from profits. That includes the cost of the goods sold, fees, supplies and maybe a home office - if the qualifications are met.

Wojnarowsky said she plans to report her eBay profits, which she estimates at roughly $2,000, but she is not looking forward to it.

Last year, the Wojnarowsky paid a $400 tax preparation fee, which included a business schedule to report online auction earnings. This year, they will crunch the numbers themselves using tax preparation software.

"I talked to a friend of mine who does eBay, and she's not filing because she said it's not regulated," Wojnarowsky said. "But my fear is, yeah, but what if you're wrong? I don't want to pay the fine."

P2P Heading for Supreme Court Showdown

On Tuesday, the U.S. Supreme Court will hear a highly anticipated case that may determine the future of peer-to-peer (P2P) file-sharing services. MGM Studios vs. Grokster has wound its way through lower courts and a U.S. circuit court of appeals. In each case, the courts have ruled that P2P services are not responsible for the illegal activities of the people who use them.

At issue is whether the software underlying such services encourages illegal music and movie copying to the extent that it has no substantial legal use - the argument embraced by many content companies, including a big group of Hollywood movie studios. The makers of the file-sharing software and a host of technology allies, however, say that is not so.

The technology proponents warn that stifling P2P services would slow down a great deal of technology growth; the impact would not be confined to illegal file sharing. "There are plenty of legitimate reasons to use P2P networks," says Yankee Group's Nitin Gupta.

But content providers - mostly movie studios, in this case - claim that the companies that run P2P services, such as Grokster, as well as the companies that make the software that underpin them, know that the vast majority of activity on their services will consist of illegal file sharing. Thus, the services themselves should be held responsible for what their users do, they contend.

The music recording industry has been struggling with these issues for many years. But those who would upload and download illegal copies of motion pictures have been hampered in the past by a lack of sufficient bandwidth. Typically, it would take anywhere from one to several hours to transfer a movie, even over a fast connection.

Now, though, many more Internet users have fatter pipes, making it easier to share films, and piracy has become a much bigger problem.

"This situation kind of snuck up on the music industry," Gupta notes. "The movie studios see an opportunity to better deal with it."

The question, though, is exactly what would constitute "better." Chasing the pirates certainly presents one option. But the makers of copyrighted material tend to oppose new technology rather than see the opportunities it provides, Gupta explains.

"The recording and movie industries need to have a willingness to explore different business models," he suggests.

Macintosh Hacker Attacks Are on the Rise

Hacker attacks on Apple Computer Inc.’s Macintosh OS X operating system, thought by many who use the Mac to be virtually immune to attack, are on the rise, according to a report from anti-virus software vendor Symantec Corp.

"Contrary to popular belief, the Macintosh operating system has not always been a safe haven from malicious code," said the report, which was issued on Monday.

"It is now clear that the Mac OS is increasingly becoming a target for the malicious activity that is more commonly associated with Microsoft and various Unix-based operating systems."

An Apple spokesman said the Cupertino, California-based company would have no comment on the report.

Many in the Macintosh computer community have long claimed that the Mac platform has been virtually immune to attack - unlike Microsoft Corp.’s Windows operating system, which runs on more than 90 percent of the world’s personal computers.

The Macintosh operating system, the current version of which is based on the Unix operating system, has less than 5 percent of the global market for computer operating systems.

"All these platforms have vulnerabilities - it’s a fact of life," said Gartner analyst Martin Reynolds. "The truth of the matter is that Mac is only a couple percentage points of (computer) shipments so it’s not an interesting target."

Apple’s recent introduction of the Mac mini, a $500 computer sold without a display, keyboard or mouse, could actually increase the likelihood of more malicious software computer code targeting the Mac platform, Symantec said.

"The market penetration of Macintosh platforms will be accelerated by the much lower priced Mac mini, which may be purchased by less security-savvy users," the report said. "As a result, the number of vulnerabilities can be expected to increase, as will malicious activity that targets them."

Symantec said that over the past year, it had documented 37 high-vulnerabilities - weaknesses that leave the system open to malicious software attacks - in Mac OS X. They "have been confirmed by the vendor, which, in the Apple case, almost always means that the company has released a patch."

A patch is a small piece of software designed to shore up a vulnerability or to fix other software glitches.

At the same time, the report said that while those vulnerabilities in the Mac operating system will increase, "they will likely be outnumbered in other operating systems for some time to come."

Company Backs Off Bounty for Mac OS X Virus

A company that offered $25,000 for the first virus that automatically spreads among Apple Computer computers running the OS X operating system cancelled the virus writing contest and retracted the offer of cash, citing concerns about legal liability.

DVForge says that it will not offer cash for a Mac virus, after legal concerns were raised about the contest and in the wake of complaints from Apple security experts. The contest was announced last week and was intended to raise awareness of what Jack Campbell, chief executive officer of DVForge, considers fear mongering by antivirus company Symantec. Symantec last week said that threats to the Apple platform were on the rise, Campbell says.

DVForge, of Hendersonville, Tennessee, makes a variety of peripheral devices for Apple products, such as the "JamPod," a small guitar amplifier module that plugs into IPod portable music players and allows their owners to play along with the songs stored on the device. In addition to selling products for the Apple platform, the company uses Apple computers internally and is a bastion of Apple technology experts and loyalists, Campbell says.

The idea for a contest to create the first self-propagating virus for the OS X platform was the result of frustration over a widely publicized report from Symantec last week, which said that the Mac OS is increasingly a target for malicious activity that is more commonly associated with Microsoft’s Windows and Unix-based operating systems.

The Symantec warnings were baseless and intended only to "scare the hell out of people," Campbell says. Company employees, including Campbell, "lost our minds" when they read about Symantec’s claims, and saw the report as a threat to DVForge’s business, as much as Apple’s.

The idea of a contest grew out of conversations with technical staff at DVForge last week and was intended to call Symantec’s "bluff," Campbell says.

"We have just as much incentive as Apple to fight back," he says.

The company placed two G5 PowerMac computers running OS X 10.3 Panther on the Internet and issued a statement on its Web page that challenged Internet users to create a virus that would spread between the two machines on or before July 31, 2005. In a dig at Symantec, DVForge offered double the reward, $50,000, to any employee of Symantec who won the contest, Campbell says.

Campbell was confident that the security features in OS X would prevent anyone from creating a self-propagating virus that moved between the two machines before the deadline expired, he says.

However, after word of the contest quickly spread online, Campbell was contacted by senior Apple employees who were experts on the security of OS X who said that it was possible to create such a virus, though doing so would be difficult. The Apple employees encouraged Campbell to end the contest. He was also contacted by an intellectual property attorney and Mac enthusiast, who warned him that writing a virus could be considered illegal, and that DVForge could be considered to be aiding and abetting an

illegal activity by sponsoring the contest.

Worried about the prospect of embroiling his company in a legal battle, Campbell cancelled the contest Saturday. However, he also issued a strongly worded statement on the DVForge Web site that railed against Symantec and "the rest of the fear-breeding folks who [prey] on the lack of knowledge about how viruses work."

Companies such as his have a responsibility to take a stand on matters such as the relative security of operating systems, and to counter what he considers untruths, such as the often articulated opinion that the lack of viruses and worms that target the Mac platform is due to the relatively small number of Mac users, he says.

eBay Wins Preliminary Patent Ruling

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office has given another boost to eBay Inc. in its legal fight with MercExchange Inc. by signaling that it may revoke a second patent owned by the small Virginia business.

In a filing posted on its Web site, the patent office said it found the latest patent to be invalid because its claimed inventions either were obvious or had been anticipated by other patents.

The decision could prove very helpful in eBay’s attempt to challenge a $25 million patent infringement award won by MercExchange in 2003.

The patent office made a similar ruling in January involving another MercExchange patent. In both cases, the decisions by the patent office are preliminary, and any final rulings can be appealed inside the patent office as well as through the federal court system.

MercExchange said it plans to appeal.

"We will deal with this office action, like all previous office actions during the prosecution of our patents, in the ordinary course," said Thomas G. Woolston, a patent attorney who owns MercExchange.

Microsoft, EU Agree on New Windows Name

Microsoft Corp. said Monday it would use an "N" to designate Windows XP versions stripped of the company’s media player to comply with an antitrust judgment from the European Union.

The agreement with the EU came after antitrust regulators rejected Microsoft’s first choice, "Windows XP Reduced Media Edition," on grounds it would discourage sales and mislead customers.

The player-free operating system will simply go by "Windows XP Home Edition N" and "Windows XP Professional Edition N" - the "N" standing for "not with media player."

A year ago, EU regulators ordered Microsoft to produce for European consumers a version of Windows without media player software for viewing

video and listening to audio. Regulators had ruled that Microsoft abusively wielded its monopoly to lock out competitors, such as RealNetworks Inc. and its Real Player software. Microsoft also was fined a record $665 million and ordered to share some software blueprints. The Redmond, Wash.-based company is appealing.

Microsoft’s top lawyer in Europe, Horacio Gutierrez, said company officials "have some misgivings" about the new name, but decided to cooperate "in order to move forward and accelerate the pace of the implementation process."

Gutierrez said Microsoft had given the EU nine different names the company was willing to accept, but the EU rejected them all.

Although the agreement on the name could clear the way for Microsoft to start shipping the player-free version to computer stores in Europe, software rivals are now complaining that the new version is not fully compatible with their programs.

EU spokeswoman Antonia Mochan said EU regulators "were still awaiting the results of market testing," adding that the issue "goes wider than the name."

The EU said last week it was assessing more complaints about Microsoft’s compliance with the EU order.

The EU has said it could impose additional prohibitive fines of up to 5 percent of the company’s daily global sales.

Microsoft has not disputed that its player-free version does not work as well as the full version, but argued it had to remove certain parts of the program to comply with the ruling.

The Association for Competitive Technology, a pro-Microsoft trade group, criticized the new name, saying consumers won’t easily know from it that they are buying a version without media capability.

"If consumers are not well-informed of what version of Windows they are purchasing, they will have difficulty ensuring the programs they purchase will run on their machines," the group’s president, Jonathan Zuck, said in a statement.

Microsoft Relents on Blaster Teen’s Payback

Microsoft has relented on the restitution that teenager Jeffery Lee Parson was ordered to pay for creating a variant of the MSBlast worm, which infected some 50,000 computers by exploiting a Windows vulnerability.

After pleading guilty in January, Parson was sentenced to 18 months in prison to be followed by 100 hours of community service and three years of supervised release. He was also required to pay US$500,000 in restitution to Microsoft.

Wednesday, Microsoft requested that Parson s fine be commuted to an additional 225 hours of community service that does not involve computer or Internet use.

Microsoft s about face no doubt will dismay some people in the Internet security community, not to mention those companies and individuals impacted by the worm. Prior to the teenager s sentencing, Microsoft officials had made statements suggesting the damage could be in the millions.

Many felt that Parson s sentence, which was the minimum time allowed under sentencing guidelines, was too light for his crimes.

"I never felt the feds should have done a plea agreement to begin with," says Panda Software CTO Patrick Hinojosa. "From what I understood, there was enough hard evidence on his computer that authorities could have put him in front of a jury, and if he had been convicted, he could have served ten years." Anything less, he says, "sends the wrong message. They need to nail these guys to the wall."

Indeed, federal authorities had asked the maximum penalty of 37 months and suggested that Parson pay more than $600,000 in compensation to Microsoft. U.S. District Judge Marsha Pechman, however, reportedly felt there were mitigating circumstances, citing Parson’s parents’ neglectful behavior as one factor that led to his actions.

Parson was a high school senior when he downloaded the original Blaster worm in 2003 - which went on to infect some 9.5 million computers - and modified it to create MSBlast.B, a variant that spread around the world within minutes. Two weeks later, the FBI arrested Parson at his home in Hopkins, Minnesota.

F-Secure security researcher Mikko Hypponen noted that if AV companies had not caught Parson’s variant as soon as they did, it could have done much more damage.

Spam Ain’t Dead Yet

In the past few weeks, I have heard reports that spam is finally dying. But to paraphrase Mark Twain, reports of its death have been greatly exaggerated.

The reality-at least according to companies tracking and stopping/catching spam for other major corporations and an unscientific survey of my own readers-is that spam remains a major problem for both companies and individuals. Roughly 80 percent of the world’s e-mail is spam. Thanks to the innovative technologies provided by McAfee, MailFrontier, FrontBridge, MessageLabs, and others, we’re seeing less of it on our desktops and in our in-boxes. But we need to face facts. Spam hasn’t disappeared. It’s just being corralled briskly into holding pens for you and your company to evaluate, ignore, and eventually delete. On the whole, however, it still costs companies millions of dollars to manage spam.

The CAN-SPAM Act has not been the panacea the U.S. government planned and has done little to stem the flow of spam onto desktops and corporate servers. More than a year after its passage, some companies, like enterprise antispam provider MX Logic, estimate that as little as 13 percent of spam mail complies with the law (by allowing recipients to opt out of getting any more spam from the same sender), down from a 16 percent compliance rate in September 2004. Perhaps the biggest development in the war against spam occurred late last year in a Virginia courtroom, when jurors voted to convict Jeremy Jaynes and his sister Jessica DeGroot for

sending bulk e-mails under false e-mail addresses. These were no small-time mom-and-pop felons who did a little black-hat business. Jaynes and DeGroot were listed as number eight on the spam watchdog group Spamhaus's list of most-wanted spam purveyors. The conviction is potentially very good news. But the ruling did have its share of oddities.

The trial took place in Virginia, but that's not where the spammers are from; it's simply where the servers they used were located. More interestingly, the jury seemed torn over the severity of DeGroot's and Jaynes's crime, recommending a nine-year prison term and just $7,500 in fines. I'd say they got that part backwards. I don't know what putting these kinds of criminals behind bars will do. Better to bar them from buying and using computers and the Internet for five to ten years. Likewise, spam-catching costs corporations around the world millions of dollars each year in software, servers, and other resources. So, $7,500 is little more than a nod toward the spammers' real fiscal responsibilities. If Jaynes did, as prosecutors charged, make $24 million from his enterprise, he should be fined at least that much. In Germany, they're now promising hefty fines for spammers. The U.S. government should hurry up and do the same.

Still, the judicial victory should embolden prosecutors to go after other spammers on Spamhaus's list. Oddly, I have yet to hear about another spammer going to trial or jail, or even being arrested.

I guess the next logical step is for companies to go after spammers themselves with civil lawsuits. In theory, some major corporations should be suing Jaynes and DeGroot. They should work with state and federal officials to time those civil suits to hit at the same time the spammers face criminal charges. It could be a hugely effective one-two punch.

On the other hand, if those who believe spam is dying are right, we can sit back, do nothing and let CAN-SPAM take its course. With a 13 percent compliance rate, those death throes should continue for another 50 or 60 years.

Phishing Attacks Still Climbing

The number of phishing attacks grew slightly during February, and there was also increased malicious software use, a group that monitors attempts at online identity theft says.

There were 13,141 unique phishing e-mail messages reported to the Anti-Phishing Working Group (APWG) during February, up 2 percent on the number reported to the group in January. The number of phishing Web sites supporting these activities rose to 2625, up 1.8 percent compared to the prior month, according to the group.

APWG compiles its data using information from ISPs, network administrators, law enforcement agencies, and individuals.

Phishing is a form of online identity theft that uses spoof e-mails and fraudulent Web sites, among other techniques, to lure people into divulging personal financial data such as credit card numbers, account usernames, passwords, and, social security numbers.

The average monthly growth rate of phishing e-mails from July 2004 through

February was 26 percent, according to Peter Cassidy, the group's secretary general.

"What's scary is that we are seeing the numbers of servers being co-opted by scammers for criminal activities really jumping. It's as if they are taking over more of the Internet infrastructure," he says.

The financial services industry continues to be the main focus of scammers, with 78 percent of attacks targeting the customers of banks and other types of financial institutions, according to the group.

There was also a rise in the number of reports of keylogging and pharming, the group says, without giving details.

Keylogging involves using software to record keystrokes made on a computer and is commonly used to steal passwords. Pharming involves interfering with DNS (Domain Name System) servers to direct people to counterfeit banking or e-commerce sites when they think they are visiting a legitimate site.

The country hosting the most phishing Web sites in February was the U.S., followed by China, the group says.

Microsoft Sues Alleged Identity Thieves

Microsoft Corp. on Thursday filed 117 federal lawsuits against unnamed defendants, accusing them of a high-tech form of identity theft known as "phishing."

The lawsuits, filed in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington, accuses the "John Doe" defendants of using mass e-mail or pop-up ads to coerce consumers into revealing personal information such as bank account information, passwords or social security numbers.

The Redmond-based software company said it filed the lawsuits in hopes of uncovering some of the largest operators.

In phishing scams, the Internet-based communications often purport to be from legitimate organizations, such as banks, and use that perception of a trusted relationship to get people to reveal personal information.

To avoid such identity theft, experts warn that users should be wary of giving out any personal information via e-mail or pop-up ads, especially if someone contacts them unexpectedly. Users also should be wary of clicking on e-mail links, which could divert a user to a malicious site that will then steal personal information.

Microsoft Working on New ID System for Windows

Microsoft Corp. will build software for managing identities into Windows in order to beef up security by giving users more control over their personal information, the world's largest software maker said on Tuesday.

The ID technology called "info-cards" will give users more control over their own personal information in order to shop and access services online,

said Michael Stephenson, director in Microsoft’s Windows Server division.

Microsoft is currently working on a new Internet Explorer Web browser and version of Windows, code-named Longhorn, but Stephenson declined to say whether "info-cards" would be built into the current Windows XP version or Longhorn.

"We’re trying to make the end-user experience as simple as possible," Stephenson said, adding that Microsoft’s "goal is to make sure that this is as broadly accessible as possible."

The initiative is the latest effort by the software giant to improve the reliability and security of its software. Identity theft has become a growing concern in the United States as personal data is increasingly used to make purchases, and log into Web sites for vital information and services.

The U.S. government is considering greater regulation of data brokers following a rash of break-ins and other data losses that have heightened concern about identity theft - a crime that costs consumers and businesses an estimated $50 billion annually.

The technology proposed by Microsoft is reminiscent of two software tools detailed by the Redmond, Washington-based company in 2001 called Passport and Hailstorm.

Hailstorm was quietly shelved after privacy advocates said it put too much sensitive information into the hands of a single company and partners expressed similar reservations.

Passport, used to provide a single log-in for multiple Web sites and store basic personal information, did not gain the wide audience that Microsoft hoped for. Online marketplace eBay Inc., an early Passport adopter, stopped using the service for its users in January.

While Microsoft’s earlier plans involved the use of centrally stored information beyond computer desktop, the "info-card" system will keep data stored on a personal computer, Microsoft said.

"It’s going to put control of digital IDs into the hands of an end-user, the end-user will be in full control," Stephenson said.

ChoicePoint Inc., which maintains personal profiles of nearly every U.S. consumer for companies that need to conduct credit and security checks, said earlier this year that it inadvertently gave criminals tens of thousands of consumer records, sparking fears of widespread identity theft and government probes.

On Monday, the University of California, Berkeley, said that a laptop computer containing the names and Social Security numbers of nearly 100,000 graduates, graduate students and applicants, was stolen earlier in March and that police were investigating the theft.

Google Boosts Free Storage in Web E-Mail Battle

Google Inc., which took the first shot in the free e-mail storage battle with the release of its Gmail product last year, said on Thursday it is

doubling free storage to 2 gigabytes shortly after Yahoo Inc. matched its original offer.

Google said the increase will not be the last from the company, which intends to make further free storage increases on its Web e-mail system as user needs expand.

"We plan on continuing this increase for the foreseeable future," said Georges Harik, product management director for Gmail.

Harik said that "less than a few percent" of Gmail users are bumping up against the 1 gigabyte limit.

"We're doing it to anticipate what our users needs are and their needs grow over time," he said. The Web search leader did not immediately say how many Gmail accounts have been created.

Gmail, which is still in testing, is now offered only as an English-language service.

Consumers are increasingly using their e-mail inboxes to store everything from work documents and correspondence to larger digital music, video and photo files. At the same time, the price of providing Web e-mail storage has been in steep decline.

Yahoo last week said it would begin giving users of its free Web e-mail service 1 gigabyte of storage, four times more than it had previously offered.

"We're hoping to remove storage as a concern for Yahoo users," Yahoo spokeswoman Karen Mahon said of her company's latest move.

"At a certain point beyond 1 gigabyte it just becomes a number and irrelevant to most free e-mail users," Mahon said.

Yahoo Mail, available in 15 languages in almost two dozen countries around the world, gives users 2 gigabytes of storage for $20 a year.

Microsoft Corp. offers 250 megabytes of storage to users of its free MSN Hotmail accounts. Like Yahoo, it offers 2 gigabytes of storage for an annual fee of $20.

Comdex Cancelled Again

Comdex, once one of the largest high-tech tradeshows in the world, has been cancelled for a second year, the show's owner said Tuesday.

Comdex 2005 was cancelled despite the efforts of its owner MediaLive International Inc. to take the conference out of limbo. The tradeshow, which is traditionally held in Las Vegas, Nev., in November, was cancelled last year for the first time after 25 years.

In a statement, MediaLive said it had been working "diligently to determine how Comdex can best meet the future needs of the industry."

"Through our continued discourse across the community of IT buyers, vendors and other stakeholders, we've made significant progress," the San

Francisco-based company said. "However, considerable work remains to build an industry event to serve the industry as it matures with the same success that Comdex did in its infancy."

Comdex was launched in 1979 by Sheldon Adelson, who at the time was the owner of Needham, Mass.-based, Interface Group. The show was sold in the mid-1990s to Softbank.

At the time of the sale, Comdex attracted more than 200,000 visitors to the Las Vegas Strip. After Softbank, the conference grew smaller under a string of owners, as former exhibitors focused on smaller, but highly targeted, information-technology events.

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